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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Letter dated 24 October 2001 from the Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel is escalating its war against the Palestinian people which started on 28 September 2000. Since the early hours of Thursday 18 October, the Israeli military occupation forces have surrounded and occupied a number of Palestinian controlled areas, using heavy artillery, tanks, troop carriers, bulldozers and helicopters, causing vast destruction to Palestinian property, and killing and wounding scores of Palestinian civilians. Furthermore, Israel is persisting in its policy of extrajudicial executions and assassination of Palestinian personalities. All of which constitute flagrant breaches of the principles of human rights, particularly the right to life, and grave violations of the principles of international humanitarian law and international law.

This Israeli aggression, represented by the Israeli military incursion into Palestinian towns and villages, together with its consequences represented by imposing severe collective punishment with the aim of pushing Palestinians towards a humanitarian crisis and starvation, wilful killing of civilians, house demolition, shelling of schools, mosques, churches and hospitals with artillery fire, is still going on to this day.

Israeli forces have killed, only during the period from 18 to 21 October 2001, 26 Palestinians and have injured over 200 others. Many of those killed were uninvolved in clashes.

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In Jenin, more than 20 tanks entered the city, accompanied by helicopters, and shelled residential buildings. A teenager, Reham Ward, was killed in cold blood when Israeli occupation forces shelled her school in Al-Almaniya neighbourhood in Jenin City. Eleven other girls under the age of 12 were also injured in the attack and taken to the Jenin Hospital.

Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers have also entered into and surrounded Tulkarm, Qalqilya and Nablus. Each of these cities have been cut off, and shelling has killed both civilians and members of the Palestinian police forces in Tulkarm and Qalqilya: 53-year-old Mustafa Mahmoud Salih Zitawiy and 33-year-old Mahir Abu Hasna were killed in Tulkarm; Mustafa Noufil and Samir Yusif Shawahniy were killed in Qalqilya and five others were injured, two of whom are in critical condition.

Bethlehem and its surrounding villages have been completely closed off, and Israeli tanks and troops are shooting indiscriminately at hospitals and open markets heavily populated with the most vulnerable civilians.

Between Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, an assassination killed one Palestinian activist and two of his companions. They were killed on the evening of Thursday, 18 October, when the Suzuki jeep they were in exploded; the victims were Atef Abayat, 32, Jamal Abayat, 35 and Isa Abayat, 28.

In al-Khader, a 35-year-old mother of six died after being shot in the chest. Mariam Subeih was fatally shot in the abdomen by an explosive "dum-dum" bullet. "Dum-dum" bullets are internationally illegal because of the indiscriminate harm they cause.

Nineteen-year-old Johnny Josef Thaljiye was shot in the grounds of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

In Beit Jala a 34-year-old woman, Rehab Nofal, and her unborn baby died on 19 October, when soldiers detained her at a checkpoint, refusing to let her through to a hospital despite the fact that she was in labour. Rehab Nofal died after she had waited in pain for over two hours. Her child could not be saved either. A doctor was also seriously injured while on duty in the Husseini Hospital in Beit Jala when the hospital came under attack. In Beit Jala also, 22-year-old Rania Kharufa was mortally wounded by Israeli fire on Saturday, 20 October.

Thirteen-year-old Basil Al-Mubasher was murdered in Khan Younis on 19 October, as an Israeli tank shell was fired from the illegal settlement of Neve Dekalim, directly hitting the child, instantly killing him and tearing his body apart.

Thirty-nine-year-old Aisha Abu Odeh, mother of eight, was killed by shrapnel from Israeli tank fire while visiting her mother in Aida Camp near Bethlehem.

Fifteen-year-old Yousef Muhammad Al Bayat was killed in Bethlehem by Israeli shelling during the invasion.

On 20 October, 20-year-old Rania Murra left her home to get milk for her 2-year-old daughter Randa and was shot to death by Israeli snipers.

On Sunday, 21 October, two more Palestinians were killed in Bethlehem, during the continuing Israeli attack: 32-year-old Muhammad Suleiman Baraqa'a was killed by shrapnel during Israeli shelling of Azza Refugee Camp in the Bethlehem area. Also near to Azza Refugee Camp, an Israeli sniper shot 45-year-old Nahid Hussein Al Joujou, killing him instantly.

The Israeli army has also imposed curfews on Habla, Jayta, Kufr Qaddum and Azzun 'Atma villages in the area, adding to the thousands of civilians who have already become prisoners in their own homes. Thus, the whole Palestinian territory has fallen under the Israeli military occupation.

Each day, the Palestinian people wake up only to resume the hardship they have been through all this past year. Not a single day goes without the death and injury of more Palestinian civilians. Not a single day goes without scores of Palestinians burying one or more of their beloved.

In the light of these circumstances, we appeal once more to Your Excellency, and through you to the international community, to intervene and urge Israel to immediately put an end to its war against the Palestinian people and to stop the humanitarian tragedy the Palestinian people are going through.

I would be grateful if you would have this letter distributed as an official document of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights under agenda item 8.

Signed: Nabil RAMLAWI
Ambassador
Permanent Observer

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